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Joy in Nature

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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August, 2011

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Artist Statement

I am fascinated with colors in nature and how it affects our moods. The colors of a sunset and moonlit sky; the feeling of a brewing storm; the laziness of a cold, gray day; the roar of an ocean; and the feel of sand on your feet are elements that I want to capture in my drawings and paintings. In addition to the natural environment, animals are an integral part of nature that I incorporate in my work. Pets are the unspoken blessings that bring joy and laughter to my life. Pets, especially dogs, are proven to relieve stress, to brighten emotions, to contribute to healing, to be forgiving, and to be loyal. Finally, my family features prominently in my work. The best times in my life have all been a result of relationships and special moments with them.

Joy In Nature

Introduction

Since I was a child I wanted to be an artist and have my own art studio. I would spend hours in my room drawing. The Peanuts cartoons by Charles Schultz (1922-2000) were my first inspiration. I began drawing cartoons and sketching people, animals, and landscapes. Eventually, a local community center recognized my talent and I was commissioned to design promotional correspondence for their activities. Soon, I began teaching and developing drawing and painting classes for children and adults of the community. This opportunity led to a lifetime dedication to the arts and teaching. I developed a passion for sharing my knowledge and talents with students.

Later, as a freelance graphic artist and a stay at home mom, I began accepting commission work from my home. I was also attending community college taking graphic art courses. My business grew and I designed logos, signs, and marketing correspondence. My first commission was to design an ad to thwart medical testing on animals. Next, I was hired as an editorial cartoonist for a newspaper where my graphic art skills were again put to use.

Eventually, I decided it was time for a career change because I wanted to pursue the fine arts. I attended Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in painting and printmaking. I also took music courses to improve my skills which allowed me to later teach music. While at VCU, I began teaching at The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and began developing lesson plans and instructing teacher workshops. My underlying desire was to teach art at community college or university level so I returned to VCU and earned a collegiate license to teach art.

Not long after receiving my BFA and teacher licensure, I decided to start working towards my master's degree in Art Education at VCU. However, I wanted more studio art experience and transferred to the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts (MIS-IAR) Program. In the MIS-IAR Program I was introduced to new media. I wanted to indulge myself in the arts and grow as an artist, a person, and a teacher.

Aesthetics

My art is driven by my experiences in my life. People and animals interacting with nature and scenic landscapes inspire me to create art. My sketchbook is a compilation of drawings that record and capture observations and special moments in my life. One aspect of my art is to show the importance of family leisure time. Dogs are loyal and consistent with affection and I enjoy having them in my life. I hope my art promotes more humane animal treatment and motivates people to care for animals.

I am also inspired by elements of the natural landscape that I see and experience on a daily basis. I am especially moved by colors and textures in nature. When a striking situation catches my eye, such as people enjoying life, a beautiful sunset on the beach, or a dog's curious expression, I am moved to capture it with paint.

My works are oil and acrylic paintings and mixed media. I use a combination of realist and painterly techniques. My first interest in art was to try to understand how an artist could paint objects and people so naturalistically. I understood at a young age that was going to be something to require intense study and practice to learn the techniques of realism. At the same time, I enjoy painting with brush strokes that are more expressive. By combining these methods, I can express how I feel about the subject as well as how I visualize it. I also incorporate

symbolic depictions that represent events in my life, words of wisdom handed down from my parents, and special moments with family and friends. The symbols are not always recognizable to the viewer and sometimes they are hidden within the painting.

Artist Influences

Recurring imagery in the history of art includes people and animals in natural settings. One artist who focused on these elements, and was especially interested in depicting families with their pets, was the illustrator Norman Rockwell (1894-1978). Rockwell attempted to convey traditional values and morals in his artwork. He also wanted to show the importance of family values. Norman Rockwell also influenced my style of painting as he often included families enjoying their leisure time and included the family dog as a natural part of the outing. For instance in the *Stay at Homes (Outward Bound)* (1927), he painted a boy and his dog and a grandfather on shore staring out at the ocean observing a passing sail boat. In his painting *Going and Coming* (1947) he depicts parents, their children, and their dog filled with anticipation traveling to their vacation destination. This painting was created from several photographs that he combined and arranged into a composition.

Like Rockwell, my art reveals narratives of family life, faith, and societal concerns. He also included animals as either the main subject or as an important element in the paintings. Dogs were essential to his life as well as his art. As I paint, my dogs are by my side playing or napping just as Rockwell painted with his dogs by his easel. Rockwell was able to tell a story using his art, sometimes to capture a memory, sometimes to make a point. These are elements that I want to have in my own work.

When I am working on depictions that involve my family, the work of the eighteenth-

century painter Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807) comes to mind. In her work *Cornelia* (1785), she conveys her commitment to family over riches and jewels. This inspired me to pursue my career in art, and helped me choose my focus on family. As a mom, many of my decisions were based on the interests of my faith, children, and my family over material and financial gain. I am also inspired by her persistence to be a successful painter in a world where women weren't often recognized as painters. Against all odds she succeeded, this inspired my own working habits. Her paintings were of a didactic nature, as an educator and a mother I enjoyed art that could take advantage of a teaching moment or teach values.

Other than visual art, music is a prominent influence in my life and work. I teach music and art, these expressive practices cross over. Learning basics of visual art is similar to learning scales and chords of music. Each becomes more pleasing as the foundations are practiced and understood. I find that I often paint to different types of music. When I feel a certain way about the subject I paint, I play music that suits the mood of the painting. Music drives the mood of my creative process.

Throughout time, artists have used dogs to play diverse roles in their paintings of the middle class. By taking a second glance at many familiar paintings, many will discover a dog portrayed somewhere in the picture they have simply overlooked before. Perhaps they didn't see the dog earlier because dogs are perceived as a natural part of our everyday life. For example, the Impressionists were fascinated with the association of animals with their owners. In Pierre-Auguste Renoir's (1841-1919) *Madame Georges Charpentier and Her Children, Georgette-Berthe and Paul-Emile-Charles* (1878), he paints a dog as an intricate part of a family. His painterly brushstrokes add to the relaxed atmosphere of the family room and emphasizes the dog's personality and furry textures. In the left foreground of his painting *Luncheon of the*

Boating Party (1880-81), he depicts a young woman holding and talking to her dog companion. In Mary Cassatt's (1844-1926) painting *Little Girl in a Blue Arm Chair* (1878), she illustrates a girl relaxing with her dog in a blue chair. Berthe Morisot (1841-1895) created a painterly depiction of a terrier in *Young Woman with a Dog* (1887). She frequently included dogs and her daughter in her paintings emphasizing affection and personal companionship. Many of her paintings were a compilation of her life experiences and were not intended for the public.

Another aspect of animals in art evolved in the late 1700's to early 1800's. At that time, European artists were commissioned to create sporting dog paintings. Dog owners were proud of their pets and they were an important part of leisure and work activities. In George Stubb's (1724-1806) *Black and White Spaniel Following a Scent* (1793), he painted a close-up of a hunting dog in his rural environment. The owner's home is depicted off in the distance and gives the viewer the idea of where the dog lives. In Philip Reinagle's (1749-1833) painting *Portrait of an Extraordinary Dog* (1805), he used traditional realist techniques to create a humorous painting of a dog playing a piano. These artists found a way to include animals in paintings to tell a story and to connect to the viewers. My work includes dogs as a part of everyday life enjoying moments spent with their owners.

Artists from these different eras have found the importance of including a dog in familiar scenes. Dogs were painted as part of the everyday genre of family leisure time and nature or focused on as the subject of the painting. Many of these artists included family members in their paintings just as I include family and dogs in my paintings.

Process and Media

I take a traditional approach in my creative process. My work starts from photographic

and sketched imagery that provokes an emotion. For example, I take several photos and make sketches of a family vacation at the beach then incorporate them into one image. I use photo editing software to manipulate the image to develop the composition. Then, I create gestural, tonal, and color sketches. Once I decide on an image, I sketch it out on a panel using colored pencils, block in preliminary colors, and establish values. Then, using underpainting and glazing techniques I apply thin layers of colors from light to dark, resulting in luminous colors. This helps me to create the sense of a mood for the viewer to experience. As I paint, I reminisce about the subject or experience. This influences my color choices and emphasizes important elements in the painting. Finally, I use thick mediums and wax to create textures and impasto effects at the end stages of my painting process.

Working in acrylic paint allows me to use a wide range of textures and creative effects. For instance, I begin painting in acrylic washes to build up the surface. Then, I apply crackle and molding paste to achieve various textural effects. Next, I use chalk pastels in developing the imagery. Then, I paint using a large paintbrush and large gestural brush strokes. Acrylics have the advantage of being mixable with water-based, wax, and even oil-based media. This allows me to explore different textures and surface effects.

Even though much of my work is made in acrylic, my preferred media is oil because of the mechanics of the paint. Oils have a rich, buttery texture that can be manipulated using a variety of mediums. Using recipes I developed over time, I mix my own glazing mediums to achieve rich or thick textural effects. Because oils stay wet longer, I am able to wipe off and re-work areas as I feel necessary. After applying a layer of paint and letting the layer dry, I apply another layer that enhances the previous layers and the colors become more vibrant. Also, oil colors provide more naturalistic colors for skin tones and landscape colors. In the painting

Saturday Afternoon at the Beach (Appendix, 1), to make convincing skin tones, I first used various shades of blue and purple, then glazed over this layer with a recipe of burnt sienna, raw sienna, alizarin crimson, viridian green, titanium white, and different mixtures of oil mediums.

I also combine various media to achieve a desired outcome. There is no right or wrong media, I use the media that I feel will create the effect I want. Combining different materials is a way to explore and find new ways to create art

Mixed Media Work

The mixed media in my work includes inks, pastels, paints, glass, and clay. In my mixed media piece *Boxed Vacation* (Appendix, 2), I created four wooden boxes that reflect the beach and sea life. These pieces demonstrate my knowledge of various media and consist of airbrushing, drawing, sculpting, and working in glass. For the reflective water I used multiple layers of acrylic gloss medium. Then, I used molding paste and pumice gel to create the look and feel of sand. I used an airbrush to paint the sand and sky.

In the box titled *Boat Dock (Boxed Vacation)* (Appendix, 3), I first sculpted the boat out of clay. Then, I made a mold of the boat sculpture and filled it with broken glass and powdered glass, also called *frit*. Frit is suited to melting into the fine crevices in the mold. I layered different colors of frit. The final step was to fire it in a kiln. Some of the colors melt together to create unexpected effects in the glass.

In the second box, *Beach Landscape (Boxed Vacation)* (Appendix, 4), the starfish was a transferred iron oxide image from a photo. Using a laser printer with a magnetic ink character recognition cartridge (MICR), I was able to scan the photo into the computer and manipulate it for use in a glass process. A MICR cartridge consists of approximately 60% iron oxide. The

iron in the toner sticks to a special fusing paper. When the paper transfer is placed on glass and placed in a kiln, the toner burns off leaving the image fused into the glass.

I left the exterior of these four boxes unpainted so that they would have a natural appearance. The four pieces are stacked two-by-two and together represent the natural elements at the beach. This work was an opportunity for me to combine multiple media and techniques into one piece of art.

Family Paintings

The best moments in my life have been family gatherings and family vacations. In the mural *Vacation Dream* (Appendix, 5), I used several vacation photos and drawings from my sketchbook to arrange the composition. After completing several sketches and a colored pencil study, I laid out the painting on Luan panels which had been prepared with gesso. My intent was to present this image more like a dream than a reflection of real life. The dream-like state represented the determination that my husband and I have had through our marriage to make dreams come true. This painting also incorporates personal symbols. My husband's dream is to own a sail boat one day, so I placed the sail boat off in the distance with him gazing at the boat and soaking in the beautiful sunset. I placed a dog in the center foreground as part of the family. Our children are placed in the photo as reminders of the times we had when they were younger, and the dreams we had for them. My oldest daughter, who recently moved out on her own, was placed further away from us on the pier to symbolize her new independence. Her puggle dog was painted close to her as a symbol of her new sense of responsibility. My youngest was placed closer to us as she was a few years away from going to college. I placed myself painting a picture of a scene that I wanted to remember while my children were young. The book on the

lower right is a Bible which represents the teachings I was brought up on. My dad continues to remind me to use faith to get through life. Draped over the Bible is a crocheted scarf, a symbol for all the items my mom made for us. The curved opening in the wall alludes to the circle of life and the family united.

As a sequel to this mural I painted *Moonlight Serenade* (Appendix, 6). It is another dedication to my family. Instead of my family looking out at the boat, the image is from the viewpoint of a viewer on the boat looking back at shore. The moon is a tribute to my mother who was fascinated with the moon on the water. Though she is gone, her essence is still present in our lives. I feel that the viewer on the boat could be my mother watching us. My mother was an inspiration to my creativity and a big part of encouraging me to pursue my interest in music and art. The implied viewer on the boat also personally represents my sister and my brother, though separated by distance we are still looking out for one another. The rope is a symbol of the bond that ties our family together and symbolic of the notion that life is hard work. The importance of this painting came at a time when I became very ill and did not think that I would be around, so I also dedicated this mural to my family.

Dog Paintings

Dogs become attached to a family and become a part of our everyday life and experiences. In my work I depict dogs to show their importance to me. In my painting *Beach Puggle* (Appendix, 7), I placed a puggle in an Adirondack chair admiring the ocean scene. I wanted the dog to look like she was enjoying her leisure time as much as I do on the beach. Like Philip Reinagle, I painted a dog as the main subject placed in a human setting.

Play Ball with Me (Appendix, 8) is a painting of a dog that I recently adopted named

Bean. Bean did not have very good manners and took a lot of patience and love to re-train. Because of my persistence to make Bean a part of the family he is now just as sweet as his gaze, and loves for someone to toss the ball. I wanted to capture his spirit in this painting by using warm colors and to present his fur as soft, inviting the viewer to imagine petting him. I used molding paste to create various textures in the face of the dog and layered paint over the molding paste. The scale of the painted face allows the viewer to experience the tactility of the surface.

Next, I created several small paintings of dog faces in different poses in oils and acrylics. I enjoy capturing the personality of each breed of dog in a small snapshot-like picture, such as *Bassett on the Beach* (Appendix, 9). These paintings were meant to be enjoyed by holding, touching, and exploring the surface textures. I also created these on wooden panels that can be set on tables instead of hung on a wall.

Dogs are very loyal and are used in many ways to help people. I hope that my paintings portray the loyal companionship that animals can bring to one's life. The personalities of dogs in my paintings are meant to entice people to appreciate animals and enjoy the love they provide. I hope that more people support their local animal shelters for the care they give animals and adopt animals from rescue organizations

My work is a compilation of a lifetime of learning and experiencing God's blessings. I intend for it to be a catalyst for viewers to concentrate on the more joyous moments in life and to interact with nature and family. In the busy technological age we live in, we often forget to enjoy and interact with nature.

Conclusion

Since an early age, I knew that I had God given talents that would always be a part of my life. The MIS-IAR Program has given me the knowledge and skills needed to teach and help people to pursue their dreams. It is a rewarding experience to see that I can inspire others to pursue their interest in the arts. I want to use my skills to reach out to others who would benefit from art, such as children in hospitals or special needs individuals. Art isn't just a subject, it is an essential part of life. As Berthe Morrisot once said, "It is important to express oneself...provided the feelings are real and are taken from your own experience." (DePolo, 75)

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Appendix

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Figure 1. *Saturday Afternoon at the Beach*, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 14" x 16", 2011.

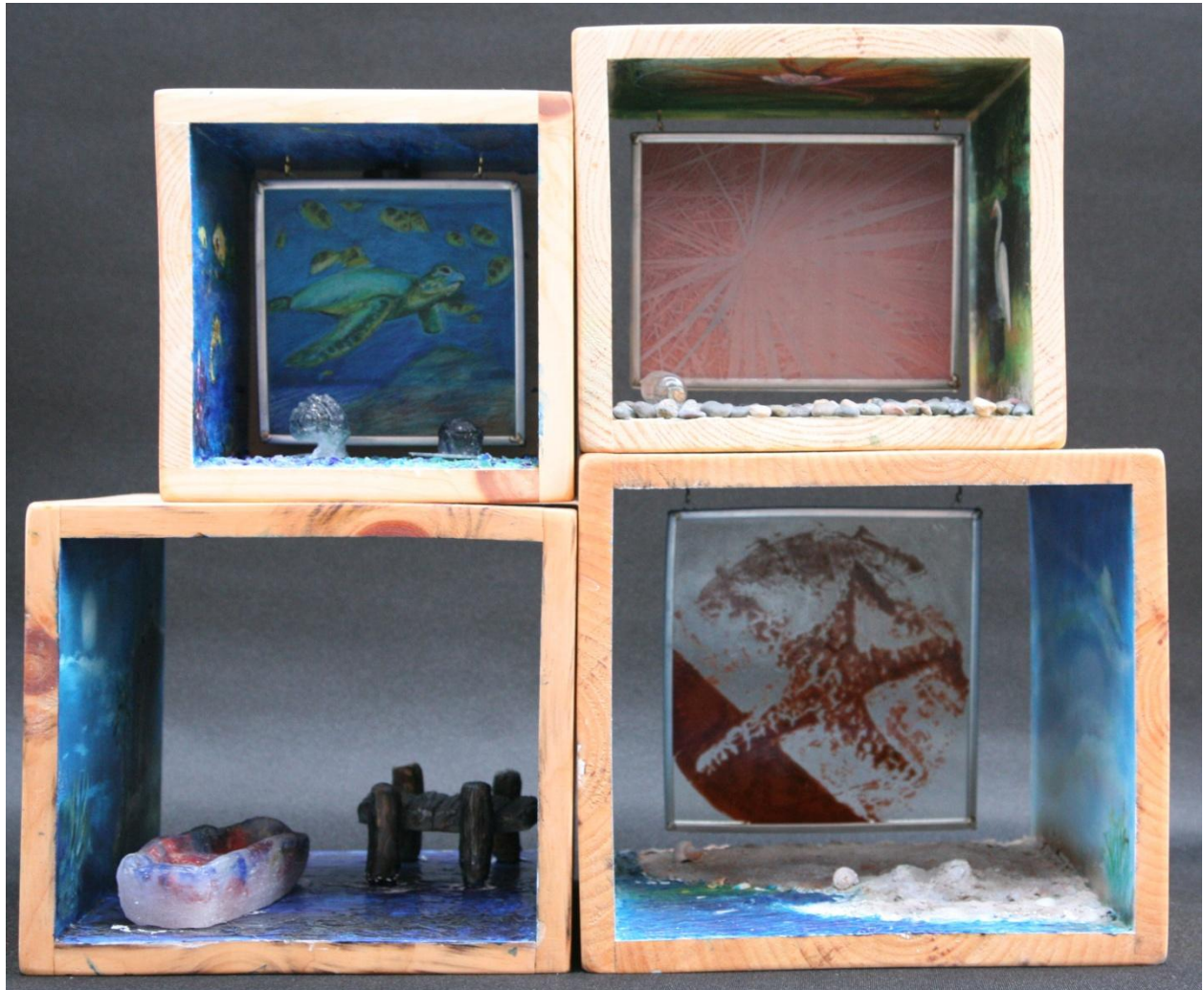


Figure 2. *Boxed Vacation*, Mixed Media, 20" x 24" x 11", 2010.

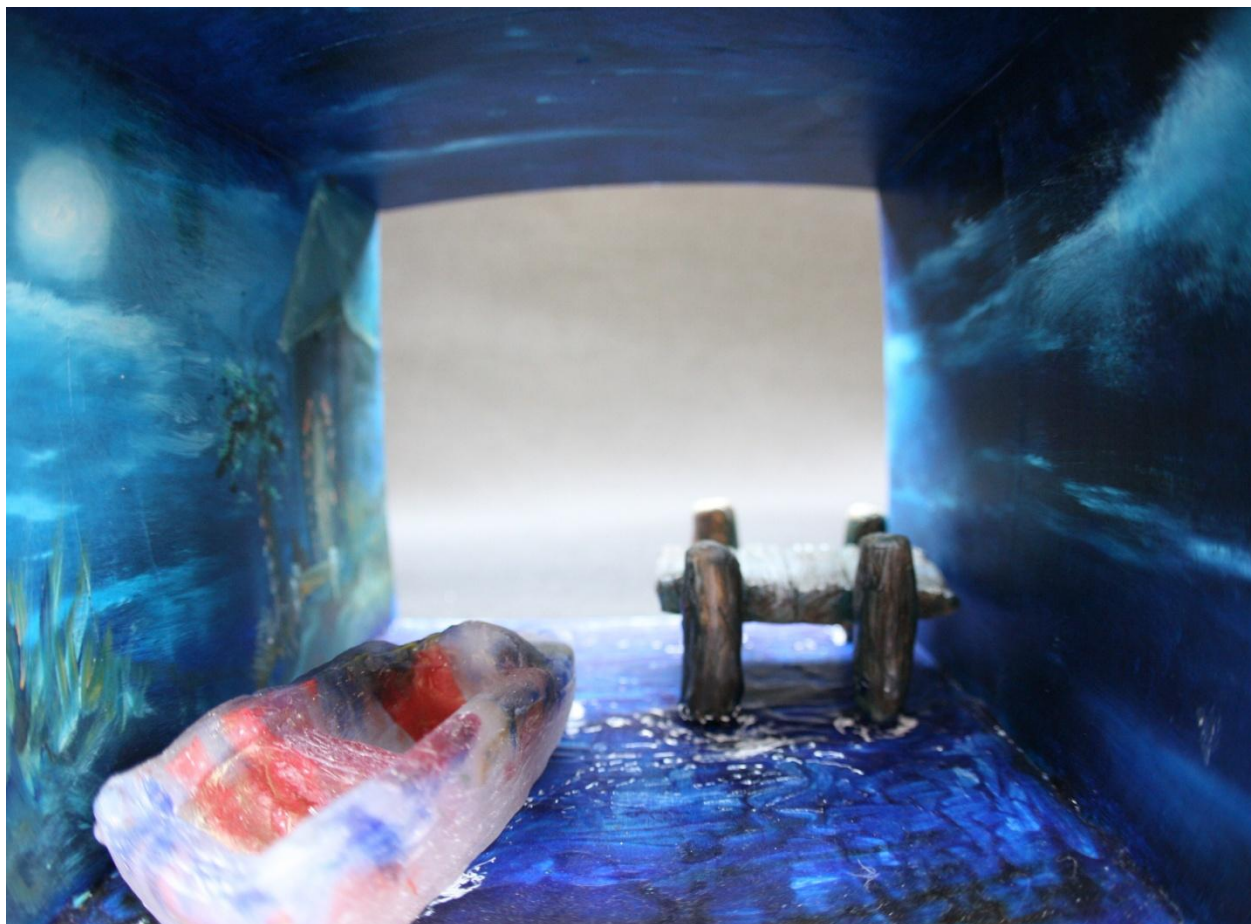


Figure 3. *Boat Dock (Boxed Vacation)*, Detail View, Mixed Media, 10" x 11.5" x 11", 2010.



Figure 4. *Beach Landscape (Boxed Vacation)*, Detail View, Mixed Media, 11" x 13" x 11", 2010.



Figure 5. *Vacation Dream*, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 48" x 96", 2010.



Figure 6. *Moonlight Serenade*, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 42" x 60", 2009.



Figure 7. *Beach Puggle*, Oil on Paper, 29.5" x 25", 2010.



Figure 8. *Play Ball With Me*, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 24" x 24", 2011.

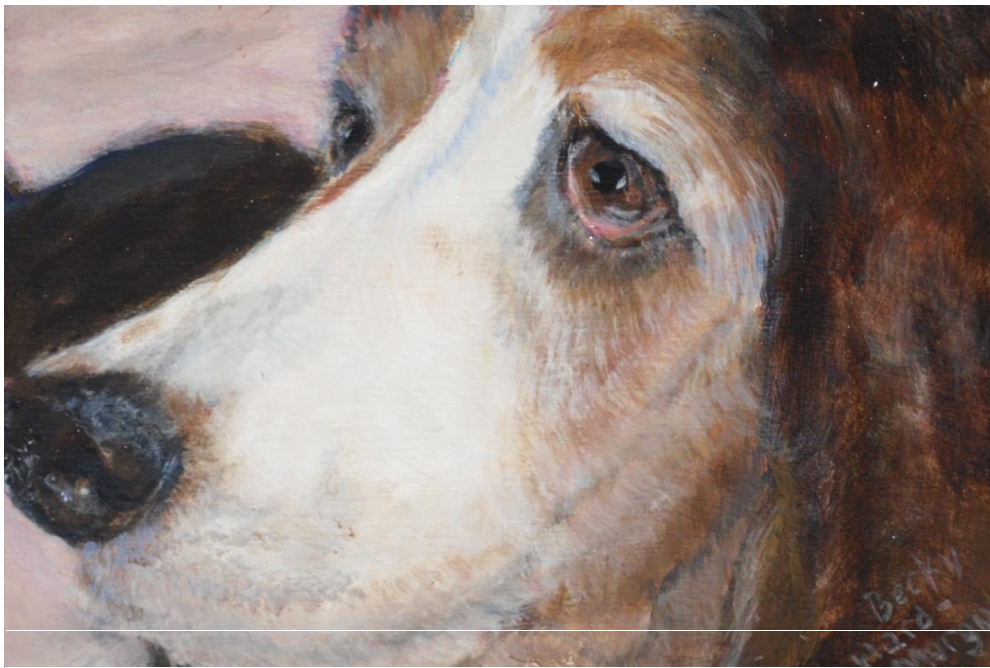


Figure 9. *Basset on the Beach*, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 4" x 6", 2011.

Rebecca C. Ward-Morgan

Education:

- 2011 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Specialization in Painting, Drawing, and Crafts.
- 2002 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Magna Cum Laude, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Specialization in Painting and Printmaking.
- 1999 Associate, Fine Art, John Tyler Community College, Chester, Virginia. Specialization in Commercial Art and Illustration.

Teaching Experience

- 2008-Present Adjunct Art Instructor, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA.
- 2000-Present Music Instructor, Private lessons, Mechanicsville, VA.
- 1995-Present Art Instructor, One for Art-Art for All Studios, Mechanicsville, VA.
- 2010-2011 Outreach Educator, The Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, Richmond, VA.
- 2001-2008 Program Coordinator and Instructor, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA.
- 2007-2008 HomeBound Instructor, Henrico County Public Schools, Henrico, VA.
- 2007-2008 Artist in Residence and Teacher, Thomas Dale High School, Chesterfield County Public Schools, Chester, VA.
- 2006-2007 Art Educator, Stonewall Jackson Middle School, Mechanicsville, VA.
- 2003-2004 Art Instructor, Grant Recipient, Increased Community Awareness Requires Everyone (ICARE), Hanover County Social Services, Ashland, VA.
- 2000-2003 Art Teacher, Hanover Parks and Recreation, Community Outreach, Hanover, VA.

Licensure:

- 2007-Present Virginia Art Education Certification K-12.

Related Experience:

- 2007 Virginia Commonwealth University, English as Second Language (VCU-ESL). Developed illustrations for textbook and web-based learning project for Adult Learning. School of Education, Adult Learning, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.
- 2007 Presenter, Virginia Art Education Association Annual Professional Development Conference, Williamsburg, VA.
- 2007 Illustrator, English as Second Language Learning Project, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.
- 1988-1997 Graphic Artist, Variety Graphics, Sterling, VA.
- 1987-1989 Editorial Cartoonist, Eastern Loudoun Times, Sterling, VA.

Honors:

- 2002 Hanover County Virginia Grant Recipient for Drug Awareness Art Project, Ashland, VA.
- 2001 Dorothy J. Hall Scholarship Recipient, Virginia Credit Union, Richmond, VA.
- 2001 Commonwealth Award, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.
- 2000 Honors Program Scholarship Recipient, Honors Department, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.
- 1996 Second Place Fine Art Award, Loudoun Museum of Fine Arts, Sterling, VA.
- 1989 First Place, International Editorial Cartoon Award, Suburban Newspapers of America, Sterling, VA.
- 1988 First Place, International Editorial Cartoon Award, Suburban Newspapers of America, Sterling, VA.

Professional Organizations:

- 1999-Present National Art Educators Association
- 1999-Present Virginia Art Educators Association
- 2009-Present Music Teachers National Association
- 2009-Present Virginia Music Teachers Association
- 2009-Present Richmond Music Teachers Association

Bibliography:

- 2001 The Catalog 19, Published by the Painting and Printmaking Department, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. In conjunction with "Interaction 19", 2001.

Exhibition Highlights:

- 2011 *Joy in Nature*, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, O'Banks Restaurant, Ashland, VA.
- 2010 *Art Educators As Artists*, Virginia Art Educators Association, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Richmond, VA.
- 2010 *Artists Exhibit*, Artopotomus Gallery, Midlothian, VA.
- 2010 *National Art Program*, Virginia Commonwealth University Health Systems, Richmond, VA.
- 2008 *VCU Graduate School Mural Exhibition*, Windemere Gallery, Mechanicsville, VA.
- 2008 *Gallery 35*, First Unitarian Church, Richmond, VA.
- 2007 *Gallery 34*, First Unitarian Church, Richmond, VA.
- 2006 *Gallery 33*, First Unitarian Church, Richmond, VA.
- 2001 *Interaction 19 Exhibition*, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.
- 1999 *Opening and Artist Signing*, John Randolph Hospital, Hopewell, VA.
- 1999 *Fine Art Exhibition*, John Tyler Community College, Chester, VA.
- 1997 *Graphic Art Exhibition*, Northern Virginia Community College, Sterling, VA.